United Nations A/52/PV.7

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

7th plenary meeting
Monday, 22 September 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Marc Forné Molné, President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra.

Mr. Marc Forné Molné, President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra, His Excellency Mr. Marc Forné Molné, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Forné Molné (Andorra) *(spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation)*: I should like first to thank for his work the outgoing President, Ismail Razali. My Ambassador, the Andorran Vice-President for the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, was a firsthand witness to both the diplomatic skill and dedication of his Malaysian counterpart. On behalf of the Government of Andorra and the Andorran people, I should like to pay tribute to his work and to thank him publicly for the trust he placed in my representative to the United Nations during this year — a year of great change and enormous challenges for the Organization.

Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. Andorra recognizes your reputation as a diplomat and your extensive experience. I have no doubt, therefore, that your presidency will be a great success and will bring about the consolidation of the reform of the United Nations, which we are beginning this year. Likewise, I extend my congratulations to the members of the General Committee, who are beginning their term as Vice-Presidents.

On 16 July, in this same Hall, I spoke after Secretary-General Annan for some minutes in order to show Andorra's support for his call for reform. The Principality of Andorra supports unconditionally the proposed reform of the United Nations, since we believe the Organization to be indispensable. As a small State, weak in a world of stronger Powers, it is in line with our national interest for us to desire that law and dialogue prevail over force and military strength. We also have more liberty than many other States to dedicate ourselves to the goals of peace and progress that were set, in a utopian spirit, by our forefathers in San Francisco.

For we are small and humble, and have no vast territories across the seas, no uranium mines on the other side of the world, no reserves of oil beneath our soil. Our interests go no farther than our own boundaries. After all, we possess the record for peace in the world — some 700 years. For all these reasons, Andorra and other small countries have the liberty to reflect on the future of mankind and the well-being of peoples as we approach

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the third millennium — without, I hope, any suggestion of the occult.

Indeed, many people have been surprised to discover that we have for centuries democratically elected our Government, and that we last used the death penalty over 50 years ago. In short, Andorrans are capable of resolving their problems without the use of force. And thanks to this legacy, without any misplaced pride or privilege, we wish to promote those reforms that will enable the United Nations to be the best hope for our peoples.

Immanuel Kant, in an essay dated 1784, stated:

"If it is now asked whether we at present live in an enlightened age, the answer is: 'No, but we live in an age of enlightenment'."

At the end of the twentieth century, are we now living in an enlightened age? The crises of development and the military conflicts that still afflict our planet make us believe the opposite. To reach our goal of an age of enlightenment, we must count on the United Nations and its ideals, and we must also count on the small countries, which will never fail to defend it.

The proposals for the reform of the United Nations presented by the Secretary-General are conscientious, fair, innovative and practical. I will not comment at length on the new administrative structure proposed by Mr. Kofi Annan. To benefit from the assistance of a Deputy-Secretary-General appears to us a natural aspiration. All of those who serve a country at the highest level know how much time must be allotted to issues of protocol and to small meetings. It is necessary for the United Nations that the agenda of the Secretary-General be lightened so that he can concentrate on larger problems. This innovation will probably have the following consequences: the Secretary-General will be considered as the statesman and the Deputy-Secretary-General as the manager. This seems to me to be a good division of labour. What must be avoided, however, is that the Deputy-Secretary-General become a counter-force to the Secretary-General. The Deputy-Secretary-General must always be a faithful representative of the ideas of the Secretary-General in order to avoid administrative tension at the United Nations.

The reorganization of the management structure of the United Nations is a prerogative that we must recognize as belonging to the Secretary-General. I therefore lend my support, on behalf of Andorra, to reinforcing the role of the Executive Committees established in January of this year, as well as to the creation of a forerunner to an executive cabinet, the Senior Management Group. I share the Secretary-General's desire to see an evolution towards greater efficiency and productivity in the management of the United Nations.

As many others have done, I take this opportunity to congratulate Under-Secretary-General Joseph Connor for having brought a spirit of good management to our Organization. It seems that during this decade in which budgets have imposed the need for cutbacks, many Governments have learned that it was necessary to reorganize resources, establish the proper relationship between work and goals and find the means to reorganize their bureaucracies and render them more efficient with regard to the work of their administrations. This was often inspired by the strategies used in private enterprise.

I thank the Secretary-General for having had the courage to begin this difficult task in the Organization. We in Andorra will try to find inspiration in the principles which will lead the Secretary-General in his reforms in order to make our own administration in Andorra more efficient.

Another point which I would like to emphasize concerns the decision of Secretary-General Annan to shift the work of the United Nations towards concrete objectives within specific time-frames. This strategy of working towards objectives will probably save money for the United Nations and serve as a model for the efforts needed to achieve development. That is the strategy which we follow in Andorra in the area of administration, and which every day becomes more accepted by many countries throughout the world.

It is well understood that these structural and functional reforms will lead to significant savings in the budget of the United Nations. However, it is of primary importance that Member States pay their debts to the Organization as they agreed to do in acceding to the Charter of the United Nations. Let us be clear: the delay in making payments to the United Nations acts as such a heavy weight on any attempt at reform that it will be nearly impossible to make progress if the conditions of payment are not met.

I would like to emphasize that my country, Andorra, pays its assessments to the budget of the Organization dependably and on a per capita basis, as do many other countries. If each citizen of my country contributes almost $2 annually to the regular budget of the Organization,

why can the people of other developed countries not do the same, even when the per capita amount that is asked of them is significantly less than that of Andorra? Happily, there are admirable and exemplary citizens who are able to make up for the insufficiencies of their own countries.

We are, after all, touching on an important topic: the confidence that we have or do not have in the United Nations. Andorra has full confidence in the United Nations. Even though we believe that the creation of a revolving fund of $1 billion is only a temporary remedy for a financial situation that should never have existed, we are prepared to add an additional 10 per cent of our annual contribution to this emergency fund if the other Member States are equally supportive and on the condition that the debtors — whether they be large or small — pay their debts in the future.

The Secretary-General asks us to consider the promotion of sustainable development as a central priority of the reform of the United Nations. On a planet that is capable before the third millennium of producing machines that travel to the moon and to Mars, sophisticated computers to help us, travel networks that link Ulan Bator with Johannesburg or Andorra La Vella with Lima in the space of a few hours — on this planet of limitless advances — the dawn of the year 2000 reveals the existence of hundreds of millions of poor people and a worrisome decline in our environment. How can we go from speeches to acts, from bemoaning the problems of the world to commitment, and undertake those actions which will bring an end to the present degradation?

Only the United Nations, as a global Organization, possesses the structure to realize those projects needed to bring about global development in the long term. We therefore applaud the Secretary-General's initiative to reform those practices leading towards development. Andorra supports him in his goal of reducing duplication and increasing the coordination of resources. In the next decade we must bring to the United Nations the most brilliant minds on the planet and put them to work in a shared spirit of rationalization in order to understand both the causes of underdevelopment and the path to follow in order eradicate it in the twenty-first century. Just as the World Health Organization eradicates diseases that afflict the citizens of the world, so too must the United Nations serve as a catalyst for the eradication of those evils that afflict the world's peoples.

We share the Secretary-General's particular concern for the natural environment, which is the common denominator of the world. If the Earth dies during the coming centuries, it will take all of us with it, rich and poor, peoples of the North and the South.

In his inaugural speech last week the President pointed to the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl as a disaster that continues to haunt not only his own country, but all of us as well. We therefore approve of the Secretary-General's plan to transform the Trusteeship Council into a body for protecting the integrity of the global environment and of shared areas such as the atmosphere and outer space.

We also believe in the mission of peace that the Secretary-General has foreseen for the United Nations. For every conflict there is a "before", a "middle", and an "after". Andorra has learned during its seven centuries of peace that it is better to take action during the "before" stage. The world calls such action preventive diplomacy.

It is all too easy to dismiss the existence of small countries as improbable and irrelevant accidents brought about by historical providence. We do not appreciate sufficiently the troubles through which many of those States — Andorra among them — have struggled at certain historic moments and that might have resulted in their disappearance from the face of the Earth. Not having an army and not using force, we have learned by necessity the importance of diplomacy. In the United Nations we must use such diplomacy by choice and by desire.

Why should we not consider, among other possibilities, the establishment of a reliable and discreet system of information to measure the political temperature of points of tension throughout the world? Why do we not empower the Security Council to examine in its debates these difficult questions before a conflict arises and temperatures become inflamed beyond the burning point? Indeed, as we consider the reform of the Security Council, why do we not concentrate more on its deeper action, with a view to giving it the means to accomplish preventative diplomacy, as we consider its size and structure?

It is truly a matter of regret that the United Nations is not the best instrument for armed intervention during a conflict, unless it is for humanitarian reasons. Perhaps this situation will change if we succeed in establishing a greater force with a greater capacity for military reaction. The United Nations can help the healing after a conflict. If we give it the means, the United Nations may become

a humanitarian and preventive force of the highest order. Andorra, which does not have and does not wish to have an army, is in the process of considering the establishment of a humanitarian force that will align itself with these objectives and with the words of international solidarity inscribed in our Constitution.

There is no better way to prevent conflicts than to teach and advance human rights and democracy. Political scientists tell us that democracies do not make war with each other. Common sense tells us that people who respect and revere the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will always find a peaceful way to negotiate their differences. For this reason, I have asked my Ambassador to the United Nations to devote, as he has before, a large part of his efforts at Headquarters to the Third Committee of the General Assembly. I have also asked him to study carefully the ways in which the Third Committee might strengthen its procedures in order that the spirit of reform which permeates the United Nations during this time might extend to all its forums of deliberation.

Andorra believes in the United Nations and, at the global level, supports the desire of the Secretary-General for reform. I have just explained our reasons for this, but, because people and States believe in the United Nations, we must better understand its functioning and its weaknesses — which are similar to those of any humanitarian organization — and especially its goals and its strengths.

Today, I would like to stress the need for a general and ongoing effort to present the United Nations to the world. We live in a world of images, as the events of recent weeks clearly demonstrate. During this time, two great humanitarian figures have died: one who selflessly dedicated her life to the poor, the other who dared to embrace the sick whom nobody dared to touch. These two women, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Diana, Princess of Wales, both lived under the light of public interest and used it to spread their humanitarian messages. In Great Britain, the Princess of Wales Fund is becoming one of the largest in the world. And yet, it is difficult for us to gain public sympathy and donations for the United Nations, although it is the first and most important instrument for works beneficial to all humanity.

Why is this so? Perhaps because it has an image problem. In these closing years of the century, let us link the United Nations to the peoples to which its Charter refers. Let us show these peoples that the diplomats of 1997 are not a club of ladies and gentlemen with little work who wander through the halls of this building. It might be a good idea — in emulation of the United Nations Children's Fund, which has established a lively and effective presence in Andorra through its National Committee — for us to ask celebrities and leaders of opinion to serve as spokespeople for the United Nations in their countries and across the world. We have the message, the mandate, and indeed the successes, but have been less successful in communicating them and allow the public to forget our actions. Let us consider together the appropriate public relations and communication strategies for the United Nations at this fifty-second session, a session of reform.

Two months ago, during my participation in the General Assembly when the Secretary-General announced his reform, I wanted to underline two points of special importance for the Andorran delegation. Today I should like to reaffirm these two aspects. First, I emphasized the importance of the small countries during this process of reform. If the reform leads to a shift away from the founding principles of the United Nations, our Organization will cease to be universal. I concede that, without the bigger countries, reform is not possible, but without the support of small countries reform will only be partial. Secondly, I called for the greater participation of youth in the process of reform and the workings of the United Nations. This is a priority for our delegation: Let us make the future with those who will inherit it.

I conclude my speech today with a call of hope and a vote of faith: faith in the United Nations and its capacity for transformation and improvement in its pursuit of peace and development; confidence in its Secretary-General, who has begun his mandate with firmness and decision, as he should; and, finally, an unshakeable belief in the irrepressibility of human progress. Through the United Nations, let us make the new millennium an age of enlightenment.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Excellency the President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Marc Forné Molné, President of the Government of the Principality of Andorra, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Koffi Panou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Togo.

Mr. Panou (Togo) (*interpretation from French*): I should like to join those who have spoken before me in offering you, Sir, my warmest congratulations on your outstanding election to the presidency of our Assembly.

To your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail of Malaysia, my delegation reaffirms its satisfaction with the efficiency and competence with which he guided the work of the fifty-first session. We wish once again to convey to him our sincere appreciation.

I also wish once again to welcome the election of Mr. Kofi Annan as Secretary-General of our Organization. In raising him to this position, the international community recognized the qualities that have brought honour to him, his country and the entire African continent. On behalf of my delegation, I pay tribute to him for his dedication to the cause of international peace and security and for all he is doing to make the United Nations more effective and credible by improving its capacity to meet the needs of today's world.

Two years ago, we celebrated the United Nations first half-century. We recommitted ourselves solemnly to working together to advance peace, development, equality, justice and understanding among all the peoples of the world. The current session provides us with another opportunity to assess our collective work at a time when we are preparing to enter the twenty-first century with major achievements under our belt, to be sure, but also with innumerable challenges to face.

In its ongoing quest to make life better for peoples, our Organization has adopted and is implementing alternative strategies to meet the demands of a world in constant change. The proclamation of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the advancement of the rights of women and children, and the convening of a special session of the General Assembly on environment and development are all actions demonstrating the determination of the United Nations to address the great problems of our time. But we must recognize that, despite the efforts of the international community to establish a new world order, we are still waiting for the ardently desired peace, security, development and growth to materialize.

Despite the detente that has existed since the end of the East-West antagonism, the international political situation continues to present a gloomy picture, marked by ongoing disputes, tensions and conflicts. Even if piecemeal efforts are made to settle these crises, definitive solutions seem to elude us. Thus, we remain deeply concerned for the future of mankind.

Moreover, our helplessness in the face of resurgent terrorism, worsening poverty, the ever growing number of refugees and displaced persons and the deterioration of the environment dims our hope that the noble objectives laid down in the Charter to build a better world for future generations will ever come true.

In this context, Togo, under the guidance of the President of the Republic, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, is striving to strengthen the political and legal bases of a state of law and to make development and, above all, the eradication of poverty the cornerstones of its policy.

The citizens of Togo have entered a new era in the achievement of greater liberty, justice and progress in order to make their country a democratic, united and prosperous nation. Every day, they demonstrate their will to reflect in their actions this deep-rooted desire to live together in peace and unity. According to experienced observers of good faith, the democratic institutions established in Togo are proving themselves. The National Assembly, having become an outstanding forum for democratic debate, is living proof of the country's commitment to entrench itself in democracy.

Most of the other institutions of the Republic provided for under the Constitution have been established — for example, the High Audiovisual and Communication Authority, the Constitutional Court, the National Commission for Human Rights and the Supreme Council for the Courts.

Aware, moreover, that they control their own destiny, the Togolese have decided to work together towards a sound and transparent administration of public affairs. How could we not, therefore, be pleased by the economic performances achieved thanks to efforts made for the effective implementation of the Government programme? The gross domestic product increased by 6 per cent in 1996, and the rate of inflation has shown a clear improvement compared to 1995 thanks to a prudent wages and monetary policy. Improved export competitiveness and the progressive resumption of cooperation have allowed us to correct the balance of

payments and strengthen Togo's contribution to the reserves of the West African Economic and Monetary Union. The people of Togo hope that the community of nations will continue to support it in its progress towards legitimacy and legality by helping it to complete the work of economic recovery.

The maintenance of peace continues to be the primary task of the United Nations. One cannot over-emphasize that preventing crises, reducing tension, separating combatants and finding definitive solutions to conflicts continue to be among the fundamental missions of our Organization. We are pleased to see in Togo that the United Nations, through concerted actions, continues day by day to do even more. My country confirms its unswerving dedication to the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with international law, and emphasizes the need to strengthen in this area cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. Chapter VIII of the Charter would then take on its full meaning.

Despite every effort, peace remains threatened on our planet, particularly on the African continent. As regards the Republic of the Congo, Togo is concerned over the situation there since 5 June 1997. We keenly hope that the protagonists will put aside their arms in favour of dialogue in accordance with the spirit of Libreville Summit, held on 14 and 15 September 1997, in which eight Heads of State, including President Eyadema of Togo, participated. The Government of Togo urgently calls upon our brothers in the Congo to conclude as quickly as possible a final ceasefire so that, under the aegis of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the international interposition force planned by that last summit can be deployed.

As regards the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, needless to say, was involved in the search for a peaceful solution to the crisis by hosting in Lomé last March a special summit of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa. Faced with a new political situation, my Government would urge the authorities in Kinshasa to do everything in their power to provide a climate favourable to national reconciliation in order to tackle the priority tasks of development.

In Sierra Leone, the hope born of the establishment of a democratic regime and the signing of the peace agreement in Abidjan in November 1996 between the Government and the Revolutionary United Front was thoroughly tested by the putsch of 25 May 1997. My country strongly condemned this coup. It is demanding the reestablishment of constitutional order and earnestly hopes that this question can be peacefully resolved in order to avoid another crisis for the West African subregion at a time when the Liberian conflict is coming to a close. The people of Togo are pleased to note that, on the basis of the Abuja Agreement, the presidential, legislative and senatorial elections were finally able to take place last 19 July in an atmosphere of discipline, transparency and peace. My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate the mission carried out by the Economic Community of West African States, supported by the United Nations and the OAU, from the beginning of the conflict to the establishment of new democratic institutions.

I should like, moreover, given the instability that Africa is experiencing, to remind the parties concerned that they must seek to prevent fratricidal conflicts, which diverts their energy from the path of development. More thought should therefore be given to establishing an African peacekeeping force, which was first suggested by President Eyadema at the thirtieth session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU, held in Tunisia in 1994. There is now an imperative, urgent need to establish such a force, which could react promptly and effectively to any armed conflict, in order to reestablish peace and stability as quickly as possible wherever necessary.

I would like again this year to return to the question of the Regional Centre of the United Nations for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and to welcome the sending by the Secretary-General of a mission of consultants to Lomé and other African capitals to explore ways and means of revitalizing the Centre. It is clear from the decision taken in Harare by the thirty-third session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU that the Centre has a vital role to play in the maintenance of peace and security in Africa as well as in the prevention of conflicts on the continent.

I cannot fail to mention here the situation in other parts of the world.

Regarding the Middle East, my country, which had in the past hailed the courage, dedication and spirit of initiative of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders in the implementation of the timetable for the withdrawal from the occupied territories, is today concerned about the blocking of the peace process in the region. We deplore the continuation of the settlements policy and the

resumption of acts of violence, which only serve to undermine the climate of confidence that is a prerequisite for the pursuit of dialogue.

Togo urges the parties to resume negotiations in accordance with the Agreements of 1993 and 1994 in order to relaunch the peace process and achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, which has lasted now for more than half a century and is a threat to the peace and security of the States of the region.

I turn to the situation in the Korean Peninsula. Togo has been following with great interest the talks under way and calls for the establishment of lasting peace in this region. We hope that the negotiations that have begun will continue and will be crowned with success.

Everyone is aware that most of these conflicts have claimed, and continue to claim, numerous victims, including refugees and displaced persons.

The proliferation of weapons, whatever their type, is a threat to peace and security. To be sure, commendable efforts have been made to create a world free from the spectre of nuclear war. However, it must be emphasized that the maintenance of international peace and security hinges on general and complete disarmament. My country hailed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and considers the entry into force on 29 April this year of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction to be a decisive act by the international community in its permanent quest for a peaceful world. In ratifying this Convention, Togo wished to stress its unequivocal commitment to general and complete disarmament. It hopes that implementing the provisions of this Convention will help spare mankind the innumerable evils resulting from the use of such weapons.

Regarding anti-personnel landmines, my country hails the process begun in Ottawa in 1996, which concluded in Oslo with the adoption of the treaty regarding the use, storage, production and transfer of those mines and their destruction. We hope that this treaty, which will open for signature next December in Ottawa, will be ratified and rigorously applied by all States, so that, because of its universal nature, many human lives may be saved.

The end of the bipolarization associated with the cold war allowed the international community to glimpse a world in which efforts would henceforth be mobilized to eliminate poverty so as to ensure development and well-being for humankind. However, we are obliged to note that, despite this favourable environment for peace and economic expansion, poverty continues to grow unchecked and remains a striking phenomenon in our world. This situation provides a good illustration of the failure of the numerous development strategies put forward by the international community.

In this context, the case of Africa remains the most worrying. The burden of external debt, the drop in export earnings and the adverse consequences of trade imbalances have largely contributed to an increased deterioration in socio-economic conditions in many countries. The world economy, characterized, as we near the end of the century, by the phenomenon of globalization, has experienced a general growth in almost all countries over the past few years. It is regrettable, however, that despite this globalization the new rules of trade have not made it possible to dismantle the barriers erected by the industrialized countries to protect their industry and agriculture. It follows that it is still difficult for our products to gain access to their markets.

These protectionist measures, which do enormous damage to developing countries, especially in Africa, cancel out the efforts made by African countries to relaunch the growth of their economies through exports.

We cannot stress enough how much damage is caused by the closing of the markets of the North to the products of developing countries. This situation deprives the countries of the South of substantial foreign-currency income, which are necessary to promote sustained development. In this respect, the Government of Togo fully appreciates the willingness of the richest countries, reaffirmed last June at the Denver Summit, intend to open their markets further to the countries of the South. We believe that by lifting their protectionist barriers the developed countries will make a genuine and tangible contribution to the development efforts being made by the less well-off.

In this light, my Government believes that globalization must be accompanied by an impetus for increased solidarity, characterized by the willingness of the countries of the North to buy our staple commodities at remunerative prices.

Despite the commendable efforts undertaken by African Governments within the framework of structural-adjustment programmes, the economic situation in our

States remains difficult, and living conditions for our populations are increasingly precarious. Given this state of affairs, the international community has developed various strategies to help the African States find viable and lasting solutions to their many socio-economic problems. It is important to welcome here the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, which my delegation believes supports and complements the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), as well as the Cairo Programme of Action for the social and economic development of Africa.

My country also pays tribute to the Government of Japan which, in addition to its unfailing support to developing countries, has taken the positive initiative of planning to convene, in 1998, the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development. It is very desirable for the various parties involved in African development who will be participating in that forum, including Africans themselves, to become more involved in the conception and the implementation of development programmes for out continent.

Development policies for our countries cannot be conceived today without cooperation and regional integration. In this respect, the entry into force of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community is a good illustration of the will of the African States to pool their efforts to achieve sustainable development. Togo would like to reaffirm its commitment to the policy of economic integration of the continent and urges the United Nations and the international community to support the African countries in their efforts to achieve the objectives of sustainable development so as to promote prosperity and well-being for their populations.

We are pleased to note that 52 years after the adoption of the Charter in San Francisco, many processes are under way, aimed in particular at strengthening the United Nations system, resolving the financial crisis of the Organization and restructuring the United Nations in the social and economic spheres and in related areas, including the Security Council.

With regard to the Security Council in particular, it is important that the ongoing discussions on its restructuring aim at and succeed in expanding the number of both permanent and non-permanent members. Such an enlargement should take into account the interests of developing countries and should be based on equitable geographic representation in order to make the Council more representative and more democratic, thereby enabling it to respond more effectively to the requirements of the day.

Within the framework of efforts to revitalize the Organization, my delegation has noted with interest the measures envisaged by the Secretary-General and the recommendations contained in his report, presented on 16 July, which are aimed at restructuring the Secretariat and providing it with the means to serve the Member States more effectively. At this session the Assembly will have an opportunity to take part in a careful and in-depth consideration of that report.

Togo wishes to stress that the decisions and measures resulting from such consideration should not reduce the capacity of the Organization in the development field. We therefore hope, as the Secretary-General himself has proposed, that the savings resulting from more rigorous management will permit the financing of United Nations priority programmes, such as those for the elimination of poverty and the advancement of sustained economic growth in the developing countries.

At the dawn of the third millennium, humankind is at a decisive stage in its history and requires greater pragmatism, creativity and solidarity in settling its problems. In this respect, our world, in a spirit of solidarity, must mobilize further to eliminate poverty, which is the vital concern of our time, as it impedes the cohesiveness of societies and States, destroys the very basis of human rights and damages the environment. We therefore need to tackle this principal cause of instability — poverty — with the same urgency and vigour that we apply to political crises. For it is clear that no system of collective security can be viable unless we seek effectively to resolve the problems of poverty and misery that are the daily lot of most of the population of the world.

Together, therefore, let us seek a new international order based on peace, solidarity and justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Cooperation of Luxembourg, His Excellency Mr. Jacques Poos, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Poos (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I should like to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second

session. As an architect of stability, you have played a substantial role in securing the recent conclusion of a number of major agreements with Ukraine's neighbouring countries. I am certain that both that experience and the experience you have acquired in the field of international relations and at the United Nations will be decisive factors in leading this session to a successful outcome. I should like to assure you, Sir, of our full support.

I should also like to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Razali, for the skill and commitment with which he led our work at the last session of the General Assembly. I also wish to express my appreciation to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the splendid work he has performed since taking office and, in particular, for his wide-ranging proposals for the reform of the United Nations, which he presented last 16 July.

It is an honour for me to address this Assembly today on behalf of the European Union, which, like the United Nations, is seeking to change and renew itself in order to face more effectively the challenges of the new millennium.

Globalization, with its emphasis on growing interdependence between nations and their economies, is bringing profound changes in international relations. A particular feature of this globalization is the genuine revolution in the field of information and communications technologies, which banishes any notion of geographical distance. Globalization, characterized by the acceleration of trade and financial flows and by increased market integration, is a source for both progress and fresh opportunities. However, it also raises some serious questions, even among the industrialized countries, which are experiencing a worrying rise in unemployment. We note at the same time that these developments are passing by many developing countries, which remain in great poverty. More than 1.5 billion people still live in absolute poverty. We cannot remain indifferent to this situation.

We are particularly concerned by the growing inequality both within countries and between countries of the North and of the South, which is a dangerous source of further conflict and tension.

Free of the threat of confrontation in a polarized world, we are faced today with a series of global problems both old and new: underdevelopment, population growth, increasingly large-scale migration, damage to the environment, the proliferation of weapons of all kinds, terrorism, ethnic conflict, drug trafficking, violence — the blind, hateful violence against innocent people that we witness nearly every day, for example in Algeria — and crime, often in forms never before encountered.

In order to deal successfully with all these problems, it is essential that we continue to promote justice and solidarity between all countries and individuals as well as tolerance — I lay particular stress on "tolerance" — and respect for others and, above all, to strengthen cooperation between States on both the regional and the world levels.

Progressive integration that respects national identity is a hallmark of the policy of the States members of the European Union. In scarcely more than 50 years, we have succeeded in developing in Europe a stability and a prosperity that the continent has never before experienced. The European Union is based on democracy as its political system and on a social market economy as its economic system. Our market economy is not a free-for-all; it is mitigated by considerations of social welfare. States retain full responsibility in the fields of health, education and social justice. Although this system requires constant adjustment, its principles are sacrosanct.

The European Union, wishing to respond to the challenges of the post-cold-war world, proposes to take up three major challenges over the years ahead: the establishment of an economic and monetary union; the strengthening of its institutional base through the implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty; and preparation for further enlargement towards the eastern and southern Europe.

Economic and monetary union is probably the most important and most ambitious economic and political project to be implemented by Europe since the beginning of the integration process. The Euro, as the single currency is to be known, will come into existence on 1 January 1999. Its introduction is the culmination of the lengthy process of implementation of the single market. The Euro is the logical consequence of the venture embarked upon with the European Community's foundation in 1957.

In order to prepare for the single currency, the States members of the European Union have successfully committed themselves to strengthening the coordination of their economic policies and the pursuit of healthier, more stable macroeconomic and budgetary policies.

The creation of the Euro will help to achieve greater stability and a more balanced international monetary

system. It will help to reduce monetary uncertainty and will give a boost to the development of trade, investment and, hence, growth and employment both at the European and the world levels.

The Heads of State or Government of the European Union reached political agreement on 17 June this year on a new treaty for Europe, the Amsterdam Treaty. This Treaty will be submitted for signature by plenipotentiaries in two weeks' time. The Amsterdam Treaty marks a further step in the building of Europe and opens the way for the launching of the enlargement process. It provides for greater consistency in the external action of the Union, and will enable it to anticipate crises more effectively and to provide a more efficient protection of its economic interests. It emphasizes the defence and security dimension of the European Union, and clarifies in particular the Union's role in respect of peacekeeping or peacemaking missions and humanitarian action.

The new Treaty also provides for the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice, which will enable the Union to take more effective and coordinated action to combat terrorism, major crime and illegal immigration. Finally, a number of provisions underline the importance that the Union attaches to the promotion and to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This coming December, the Union will take major decisions on future enlargement. Negotiations on accession should begin as early as possible next year. The international repercussions of the enlargement of the Union will far transcend the new frontiers of an enlarged Europe; this enlargement will add to Europe's influence in the world, will provide the European Union with new neighbours and will make Europe a peaceful, more united and more stable area.

In taking up these three challenges, the European Union member States seek to unite further in order to form a common front against the problem of unemployment and to take more effective action to combat organized crime, terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of every kind, to act more effectively to prevent major environmental damage and to ensure lasting growth while making the best possible use of the world's resources.

At the same time, the European Union is seeking to increase its influence over world affairs, promote values such as peace and security, democracy and human rights in a more effective manner, defend its conception of the social model and assert its presence on international markets.

It is in that spirit, and in order to strengthen cooperation in the political, economic and financial fields, that the European Union is developing relations of partnership with all the countries of the world.

A larger and more united European Union will also make a greater contribution towards development cooperation with the most disadvantaged countries. The development assistance of the European Union is part of a policy designed to roll back poverty and inequality in the world and to foster a sustainable development.

The Union is already the largest contributor to the regular budget of the United Nations and to the budget for United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is also the largest international aid donor. The European Community and its member States provide over half the humanitarian aid dispensed worldwide and fund 50 per cent of international development aid. We provide 40 per cent of assistance for the reconstruction process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly 60 per cent of international aid to Russia and to the republics of the former Soviet Union, half of the aid for the Palestinian territories and one third of the total aid for the Middle East.

As in the past, the European Union describes its relations with third countries, together with its positions on and action in respect of areas of conflict throughout the world, in a memorandum that is circulated as an integral part of this address. I should like, however, to highlight a number of issues which continue to hold our full attention.

The European Union continues to make a major contribution towards the consolidation of peace in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It wishes to develop its relations and to strengthen its cooperation with those countries to the extent that their respective Governments pursue a policy which respects the peace agreements concluded and which enables them to progress towards democracy, the rule of law, tolerance and respect for human rights and minorities.

The European Union is concerned at the tardiness in implementing the peace agreements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It emphasizes that the responsibility for such implementation rests with the parties themselves.

We fully support the efforts of the High Representative, Mr. Carlos Westendorp. We pay a tribute to his deputy, Ambassador Gerd Wagner, to Mr. David

Krishkovich and to their colleagues who have given their lives in their commitment to peace.

The European Union is determined to insist on the strict and full application of the peace agreements in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the conclusions of the Sintra ministerial meeting. It is on the basis of such application that the European Union is willing to continue to contribute to the international reconstruction effort. It continues to attach great importance to the return of refugees and displaced persons and to demand the full cooperation of all parties with the International Criminal Tribunal as a necessary condition for a lasting reconciliation and a just peace.

Without minimizing the difficulties in the Muslim Croat Federation, the European Union observes with concern the political crisis which has erupted in the Republika Srpska. It calls on all parties to respect the constitutional functioning of that entity and to take vigorous action to reform the police and to establish freedom of the press. We believe the holding of legislative elections under the supervision of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) constitutes the appropriate and democratic means for resolving the present political deadlock.

The European Union welcomes the recent holding of municipal elections, on 13 and 14 September, with the participation of all the parties. These elections mark an important step in the process of democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We appeal to the parties to respect the results as certified by the OSCE.

The European Union also remains concerned by the situation in Kosovo, in particular by the lack of respect for human rights and the principles of the rule of law.

Concerning Cyprus, the European Union regrets that the intercommunal talks under the aegis of the United Nations have failed to register progress. We call on the leaders of both communities to resume the talks, as proposed by Mr. Cordovez. We urge them and all parties concerned to work constructively and in good faith to promote the success of these talks. We reject any link between the talks and the membership negotiations with Cyprus. The latter will be initiated in accordance with the decisions taken by the European Council and will contribute positively towards the search for a political solution. The European Union recalled that Cypriot membership should benefit both communities and should help to bring about civil peace and reconciliation.

In the Middle East, the peace process is at a worrisome standstill. The European Union calls on the peoples and Governments of the region to renew the spirit of mutual confidence which, at Madrid in 1991 and in Oslo in 1993, gave :ise to the hope of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We call upon the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to continue the negotiations to further the implementation of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron agreement, and to resume talks on permanent status. We ask them once more to abstain from any unilateral action which may prejudice the issues relating to permanent status.

The European Union firmly condemns the recent terrorist attacks in Jerusalem. We call on each side to show absolute determination in combating terrorism. We hope that cooperation in the field of security between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be re-established and reinforced. To that end, we propose the setting up of a permanent security committee with the participation of the parties involved and, possibly, with that of the United States and the European Union.

We urge both parties not to yield to blackmail by extremists bent on sabotaging the peace process. We ask that Israel discontinue certain measures taken with regard to the Palestinians which we consider to be counter-productive. In particular, we ask that Israel transfer all of the tax revenue owed to the Palestinian Authority. It is not in the interests of peace to weaken the Palestinian economy, administration and leadership and to feed the feelings of frustration and humiliation of an entire people. In the opinion of the European Union, peace remains the only strategic choice and the only lasting guarantee for the security and prosperity of both sides.

The European Union will continue, through the efforts of its Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process, Ambassador Moratinos, as well as through its diplomatic relations, its economic commitment and its relations of friendship and trust with the various parties, to work with the parties concerned both within and outside the region, and especially with the United States, to relaunch the peace process.

In Africa, major developments have occurred in recent months, notably in the Great Lakes region, which continues to experience serious problems. The European Union fully supports the efforts undertaken there, as elsewhere, by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in close cooperation with the United Nations. It welcomes the action taken by both its special representative,

Mr. Ajello, and the Special Representative of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the OAU, Mr. Sahnoun. The international community must thus aim at establishing peace, at consolidating the process of national reconciliation in the countries concerned, at creating a climate conducive to the voluntary return of refugees and of facilitating the establishment of normal democratic life. We support the introduction of the rule of law, which should put an end to the climate of impunity prevailing in the region and encourage its economic and social recovery.

The accession of the new authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo signals a very important change for the Congo and the whole of Africa. The European Union is aware of the scale of requirements for reconstruction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is willing to contribute its support for reconstruction. It confirms its readiness to resume cooperation with that Government on a gradual basis. The resumption of cooperation will depend, according to the conclusions of the European Council of Amsterdam, on the progress observed in the fields of human rights, democratization and the establishment of the rule of law.

The European Union emphasizes the need for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cooperate fully with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to ensure the safe return of refugees, particularly to Rwanda. We also urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cooperate fully with the United Nations in order that the mission investigating the allegations of massacres and other human rights violations can take place without impediment or delay.

The European Union remains seriously worried by the situation in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and is concerned that the parties to the conflict have so far failed to overcome their differences. We urge all the parties involved to cease hostilities and to work together to achieve national reconciliation and restore a peaceful society. We reiterate the Union's full support for the mediation efforts undertaken by President Bongo of Gabon.

The European Union condemns all violence in Burundi. It encourages the authorities of that country to accelerate the dismantling of the reassembly camps. We earnestly appeal to all parties in Burundi to embark definitively on the road towards negotiation and national reconciliation.

The European Union is also concerned by the worsening insecurity in Rwanda's north-western provinces, which affects all populations, without exception.

The European Union welcomes the success of the monitoring mission in the Central African Republic, established under the Bangui Agreements.

The European Union also continues to be concerned by the situation in Cambodia, which is likely to jeopardize the whole democratization process and the major efforts by the international community in support of that country's reconstruction. We renew our support for the mediation efforts by the Association of South-East Asian Nations and welcome the constructive constitutional role played by His Majesty King Sihanouk in the search for a solution to this crisis.

We appeal for an immediate end to all violence in Cambodia and reiterate the importance we attach to the holding of free pluralist elections in 1998.

I would like now to take up several thematic questions.

The tragic consequences of the indiscriminate spread and use of anti-personnel landmines have aroused genuine emotion in world public opinion in recent years. In October 1996 the Union, for its part, adopted a decision on joint action on anti-personnel landmines in which it expresses its determination to achieve the aim of totally eliminating such mines and of actively working towards the earliest possible conclusion of an effective international agreement on a worldwide ban on these weapons.

We welcome the work done at the recent Oslo Diplomatic Conference, which resulted in the adoption of an international Convention. We shall also be pursuing the achievement of our aims at the Conference on Disarmament.

Next 10 December will see the start of celebrations on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That Declaration, adopted on 10 December 1948, and the two international pacts and other legal instruments on the subject that were subsequently adopted, are still fully relevant today. We reaffirm our deep commitment to the universality of human rights and to their protection and promotion. The year 1988 will provide an opportunity for all members of

the international community to step up their actions to ensure better implementation of the universal principles of the Declaration through the instruments and machinery of the United Nations.

The year 1998 will also be an opportunity to review the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993.

We welcome the appointment of Mrs Mary Robinson as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. She will have our full support. We wish to underline the importance of her mission, not least in the context of the fiftieth anniversary.

Regarding the environment and development, the General Assembly will be asked to endorse at this session the results of the special session on the follow-up to Agenda 21 and of the Rio Conference. The European Union considers it essential that the implementation of Agenda 21 receive fresh political impetus. We believe it is imperative that we come to a substantial conclusion of the negotiations on climate change to be held in Kyoto in December. We urge all States to work towards that end.

We have proposed clear objectives for the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions, and we hope that other States will very soon be making their own detailed proposals in order to speed up the progress that is vitally needed if the Kyoto session of the Conference is to be a success.

Two years ago the Heads of State and Government meeting in this Hall on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations observed that, in a rapidly changing world, the objectives set out in the Charter had lost none of their relevance.

In many regions of the planet, we still have to face up to serious threats to international peace and security. More than ever, we need to promote economic and social development. It is vital that the ideals upon which our Organization is founded — human rights, good governance and democracy — come to be reflected more and more in the behaviour of public authorities and in people's everyday lives. The primacy of the rule of law must be reaffirmed.

We realize that if our Organization is to respond adequately to the profound changes in its external environment it must adapt its structures to the new realities of the modern world.

Last July we heard the Secretary-General's ambitious proposals, and we welcomed them. It is not, of course, a question of rewriting the mandates of the United Nations, to which we remain deeply committed, but of transforming the Organization into a productive and efficient instrument at the service of all the peoples of the world.

In examining these proposals, at its fifty-second session, the General Assembly is embarking on a period of debate and decision-making that promises to be one of the most significant in the history of the United Nations.

We need an Organization that fulfils its mandate to preserve peace and international security more rapidly and effectively by building better capacities for action in the fields of preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking, and by having more effective capacities for action in the areas of recovery and reconstruction after a conflict.

We need an Organization that responds better to one of its fundamental objectives, which consists of promoting economic and social progress, eradicating poverty and ensuring the widest possible participation in an expanding world economy.

We need United Nations funds and programmes that can translate the objectives of the Organization in the field of sustainable development. They must offer the countries and the peoples of the world both material support and a frame of reference that will enable them to generate their own development in the most efficient manner and in a way suited to their specific needs.

We need a United Nations system that provides a credible response to the complex problems of humanitarian assistance and emergency situations, problems which include conflict prevention, peacekeeping, rehabilitation and transition towards development.

Finally, we need an Organization that integrates in all its activities the fundamental concept of respect for human rights, which is an integral part of the quest for peace and security, economic prosperity and social justice.

To attain those objectives, our Organization must be able to rely not only on the commitment of the Secretary-General and the cooperation of Member States, but on the support of every sector of international society, and in particular on the non-governmental organizations, whose efforts inspire and complement our own.

The programme of reforms put forward by the Secretary-General has two parts. The first concerns the responsibility of the Secretary-General himself. It supplements the series of proposals he put forward in March this year. It is designed to rationalize the operations of Secretariat services and United Nations agencies and to improve their coordination. The proposals are intended to mould those services into a more coherent structure. There is a need to establish a community of ideas, a coherence of effort and greater flexibility in implementing action. We urge the Secretary-General to implement those proposals as quickly as possible. The European Union considers that modalities could be worked out to see that the savings realized are reinvested in the field of development.

The second part of the programme deals with improving the operation of the United Nations system and strengthening its intergovernmental machinery. It requires the approval of Member States. Here, too, the European Union believes that the method used and the choices made by the Secretary-General should open the way to effective and far-reaching reform of the United Nations. This applies particularly to the promotion of economic and social development, which must remain one of the priority objectives of our Organization.

In this sector, the reform should improve the Organization's capacity for action at the intergovernmental as well as the structural and managerial levels. In the view of the European Union, the reform of the United Nations, as an instrument in the service of development, cannot be conceived as a cost-cutting exercise; on the contrary, it must be designed to strengthen and revitalize the Organization so that it can respond to the challenges of the future in the most effective way possible. Only a reformed and revitalized United Nations can create the foundation for a global partnership between developing countries, developed countries and multilateral organizations, with the prime objective of achieving sustained and sustainable development.

The European Union believes that, taken as a whole, the programme of reforms proposed by the Secretary-General represents a balanced package. It attempts to take into account the various interests in play and, once implemented, will enable the Organization to fulfil its mandate more adequately and to carry out its tasks in the service of the international community more effectively.

We therefore consider that, if we want to achieve the renewal of the United Nations, it is of overriding importance that the Secretary-General's proposals be examined by the General Assembly in an integrated manner and as a package. It is also important to abide, so far as possible, by the timetable that the Secretary-General has suggested, so that the reform measures can start to be implemented at the beginning of 1998.

The reform programme before us affords us a unique opportunity to reform the Organization from top to bottom. It is for us, the Member States, to demonstrate the necessary ambition, courage and clarity of vision to show that we are equal to this challenge.

The European Union is well aware that the proposals before us necessarily represent a compromise between the sometimes divergent interests of Member States, and that they cannot, therefore, fully reflect either its own views or those of other schools of thought within the General Assembly.

Because we believe that the programme of reforms, taken as a whole, represents significant progress for our Organization, the Union does not intend to press for the fine points of its own positions to be taken into account with regard to each of the proposals or recommendations before us. It is our hope that other delegations will approach this exercise in a similar spirit and that they can agree to put the general positive thrust of the package of proposals before the satisfaction of their individual demands.

Over the coming weeks the European Union intends to play an active part in the Assembly's work. Our task is to reach general agreement on a feasible, constructive and coherent response to the Secretary-General's proposals, one that respects his responsibilities and his authority.

Necessary as it is, the reform exercise on which we have embarked will not bear fruit until the United Nations has the financial resources it needs to fulfil its mandates. For several years now, the United Nations has been embroiled in a financial crisis, which began as a cash-flow problem, but which has now become structural. That crisis is undermining the necessary sense of partnership between Member States and compromising implementation of the Organization's programmes in many areas. The European Union has often stated that the crisis cannot be resolved until all Member States have agreed to meet their obligations under the United Nations Charter in full by settling their arrears and by paying on time and without conditions the full amount of their

mandatory contributions to the Organization's regular budget and to the budget of peacekeeping operations.

The States members of the European Union, whose contributions represent 35 per cent of the regular budget and 38 per cent of the peacekeeping budget, have always honoured their financial obligations promptly, fully and unconditionally.

The European Union has put forward a package of coherent proposals designed to put the Organization on a sound and predictable financial footing. They relate to measures to speed up the payment of arrears, to tighten up the system for paying contributions, to monitor United Nations spending more closely and to reform the scale of assessment so as to better reflect the principle of ability to pay.

It is important that together, at this fifty-second session of the General Assembly, we find a constructive and viable solution to these questions, which are fundamental if we wish to ensure that our Organization has the capacity to fulfil its mandate at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The President: I now call on the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, His Excellency the Right Honourable Robin Cook.

Mr. Cook (United Kingdom): We inhabit a modern world in which we must accept change as the normal condition of life. Communication around the globe is becoming faster. The distance between our countries is becoming shorter. I travelled to New York at twice the speed of sound and I landed before I took off. Every word I say to the Assembly today will be sent to London down a telephone line and within minutes it will appear on the World Wide Web.

Our countries today are intertwined as never before in a market place that is global. And our people have learned that their purchasing decisions have an impact on jobs and pay across the planet — from the fruit they buy at the supermarket to the fuel they use in their cars. Changes to the environment in one continent can produce changes to the weather in another continent. Our countries are increasingly interdependent, and the challenges we each face are global challenges — challenges that we must face together: poverty, conflict, climate change, international crime and the drugs menace. These are all international problems that require us to behave as a united nations not just in name but in reality.

And so the United Nations should have a bigger role than ever before. If it appears to be less relevant, it is not for want of challenge but for want of reform. The United Nations must modernize. It must be able to confront the new global challenges that all its Members face. It will need flexibility, competence and efficiency to meet the complex needs of the twenty-first century because the United Nations cannot give leadership to a changing world if we ourselves refuse to change.

The outstanding leadership shown by the Secretary-General is an important start. His proposals for institutional reform will retain what is best in the United Nations system but give it the flexibility and the efficiency it needs to respond rapidly to the new challenges of a new century. The member countries of the United Nations must support his commitment to modernization. We must each stop measuring each proposal for reform in terms of narrow self-interest and, instead, recognize that we all have a greater interest in supporting reform.

Britain's Labour Government is firmly committed to the United Nations. We demonstrated this commitment as soon as we were elected by rejoining the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and by confirming our intention to stay in the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). We were elected because we offered Britain modernization to succeed in a new century. We pledge ourselves to back modernization of the United Nations. We do so because we know that our country, like all other Member States, will benefit from a United Nations that is efficient, representative and properly funded.

Let me take each of those in turn. Efficient does not spell cheap. But we do want to see the United Nations do the most it can with what it has got — a United Nations that no longer spends $150 million producing 2,500 tons of documents every year. We thoroughly welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to reduce the number of documents by 25 per cent by next year. We want to see an end to the duplication between United Nations agencies, and I give my wholehearted support to the Secretary-General's proposal for a Special Commission to look at the division of labour right across the United Nations system.

Another way in which the United Nations is out of date is its Security Council. We are all agreed in this Chamber that what was appropriate in 1945 is not what is right in 1997. The world has changed. Most of the countries represented here today did not even exist when the United Nations was formed. The Security Council must move on if it is not to lose its legitimacy. Japan and Germany should both be included in an expanded permanent membership, and there should be a new balance between developed and developing countries in a modernized Security Council. We are all agreed on the need for change; we have been discussing it for four years. It is time that we agreed that a proposal for change which has the backing of the vast majority of Members is better than a status quo which has the backing of none.

It is not just all the countries of the United Nations that must be properly represented, but all the people of those countries. More than half those people are women. Britain welcomes the United Nations willingness to put gender perspective into all areas of its work. The new Labour Government attaches particular importance to strengthening the rights of women. Women do more than half the world's work. They should have equal status in the international organizations of the world.

Let us also put the United Nations finances on a sound basis. Speaker after speaker yesterday referred to the need for us to cooperate to defeat those who make fortunes from organized crime and to contain the drugs trade, second only in value to the oil trade. We cannot defeat those well-resourced menaces to the modern world through a United Nations that staggers from year to year on the verge of bankruptcy.

We need a solution based on the ability to pay. The most equitable means of sharing the burden is to base contributions on share of global gross national product. But that measure will only be accepted as equitable if it is updated regularly to reflect the rapid changes to the world economy. And it is not equitable that some Members pay their contributions while other Members do not. Britain pays in full and on time. Britain expects every Member State, however large or however small, to do the same.

These three issues — institutional reform, Security Council reform and financial reform — are critical to the United Nations future. Let us commit ourselves to progress on all these issues by the end of 1997 and solutions by this time next year. Next time we meet, let us celebrate a modern United Nations that can face the future with confidence, rather than looking back on another year of agreeing about all the questions but not being able to agree on any of the answers. And then the United Nations will be able to get on with its job.

There are three key areas in which the United Nations has a vital job to do — promoting sustainable development, promoting peace and promoting human rights. Those are not separate challenges, but different faces of the same challenge. There can be no real and sustainable development or respect for human rights without peace. And there will be no permanent peace where there is only poverty and injustice.

During every speech this week another 300 children will die before their first birthday, most of them deaths that could be easily and cheaply prevented. If the United Nations is to be relevant to its Members, then more than anything else it must enable people to lift themselves out of poverty.

Britain supports the United Nations aid target. As Britain's contribution to achieving it, the mew Labour Governments has committed itself to reversing the decline in the British aid budget. Britain has also consistently urged faster action in tackling the problem of debt, and at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in Mauritius last week, British Chancellor Gordon Brown launched a new initiative to cut debt that will benefit 300 million of the world's poorest people and help developing countries escape from the debt trap.

But aid will not alone eliminate poverty. We need to continue breaking down the barriers that deny the poorest countries access to the world's most lucrative markets. We need to make sure that producers in Africa are allowed to sell their goods to Europe and to America as easily as their producers can sell their goods to Africa.

Sustainable development will do more than just reduce poverty. Poverty is also one of the greatest threats to the environment. If we want to preserve the planet for future generations, we must make sure that development respects the environment and does not destroy it. The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development has made important progress towards this goal. But it is not a task any country can subcontract to the United Nations. We are all in this together. No country can opt out of global warming or fence in its own private climate. We need common action to save our common environment.

The new Labour Government has set itself the ambitious target of reducing Britain's emissions of greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by the year 2010. At the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Kyoto, the nations of the world must sign up to binding targets and then they must keep to them.

The second key goal is peace — preventing conflicts before they happen, helping to end them when they do happen and helping to rebuild lasting peace after conflict. Each of these contributions to peace is equally vital.

But it is the United Nations peacekeeping operations that have the highest profile, and with good reason. The blue berets have prevented worse conflict across the world, from Eastern Slavonia to the Western Sahara. Many have laid down their lives, not in the conduct of war but in the pursuit of peace. The death of a dozen international policemen and envoys, among them a British diplomat, in the United Nations helicopter that crashed in Bosnia last week, was a grim reminder of the risks we ask our peace-builders to take. I pay tribute to their courage and salute them for their professionalism and their skill.

The last area in which the United Nations must focus is human rights. As the world becomes smaller, and news and ideas travel faster, so the principle that certain rights are universal becomes even more compelling. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out the right to freedom from the fear of violence and the right to liberty from the threat of unjust imprisonment. Those are rights to which every citizen of the world irrespective of race, creed or colour. They must not be limited to any one culture or any one continent. As the Secretary-General has pointed out Secretary-General has pointed out, the mothers from every culture weep when their sons and daughters are killed or maimed by repressive rule.

Nor do human rights hinder economic development. The past two decades have demonstrated that political freedom and economic development are not in conflict but are mutually reinforcing. Free societies are efficient economies. Authoritarian rule more often produces economic stagnation. That is why Britain supports the Secretary-General's proposals to integrate human rights into all the work that the United Nations does.

This is my first General Assembly. I attend it with both hope and with anxiety — hope that, if it modernizes, the United Nations can help us face the global challenges of the future; anxiety that, without modernizing, the United Nations will lose legitimacy and its effectiveness.

We must not let that happen. There are too many children stunted by poverty, too many mothers fearful of war, too many people whose basic human rights are being abuse. The United Nations offers them hope. Let us commit ourselves this week to achieving a modern, reformed United Nations that will turn hope into reality.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Yevgeny Primakov.

Mr. Primakov (Russian Federation) *(interpretation from Russian):* Mr. President, allow me sincerely to congratulate you, a representative of friendly Ukraine, on your election to this responsible and honoured post. We are confident that under your Presidency, the General Assembly will be able to achieve significant results.

In just a little over 800 days, mankind will enter upon the twenty-first century. From a historical point of view, this is indeed no more than a sprinter's lap, and thus the need to look at what lies ahead, at what awaits us, would appear quite natural.

One year ago, in speaking from this rostrum, I spoke about the emerging process of a transition to a multipolar world order. The developments of the past year support that. There is a growing diversity in the political, economic and cultural development of countries. New centres of economic and political influence in the world are shaping up, coupled, at the same time, with increased intermeshing of the interests of different States and peoples.

The horizons opening up to the international community in the twenty-first century are making new demands. These are the assertion of the ideals of interdependency and partnership in inter-State relations; the prevention of the emergence of new dividing lines or exclusive bloc structures; and strict adherence by all to the principles and rules of international law. As a separate issue, I should like to cite not only the creation of conditions for economic and social progress of all countries, but also the maintenance of environmental balance.

There is also a need to mention that the transition from a confrontational bipolar world to a multipolar system per se would not provide a solution to these

problems. Furthermore, realistically minded people realize that although we are moving farther away from the simplistic stereotypes of the ideological confrontation era, the number of existing risks and threats in the world is not decreasing.

Regional conflicts continue to be one of the major sources of instability on the global level; they should not be allowed to continue into the twenty-first century. How can this be achieved? A characteristic of our days is the increasing number of intra-State problems — conflicts of an ethnic rather than social nature. There are many multinational States in the world today, and we support the initiatives designed to prevent their forcible disintegration.

The formula for settling such conflicts in today's world — and, of course, in the twenty-first century — can and must combine the need to preserve the territorial integrity of those States with the provision of the maximum possible number of rights to their national minorities. To abandon any of the principles of this two-track formula would result not only in the continuation but in the dangerous escalation of such conflict situations.

Likewise, I wish to draw the Assembly's particular attention to a dangerous aspect of regional conflicts: their ability to trigger terrorist waves and spread them far and wide beyond the borders of the actual conflict zone. For example, many of the militants who launched a bloody campaign of terror in a number of countries emerged out of the ongoing armed conflict that still rages in Afghanistan.

We strongly support the combat against terrorism, whatever trappings it may don, be it in Ireland or in Israel. Today, we will not be able to prevail in this fight without all States pooling their efforts to combat this greatest of evils. While we oppose the backing of terrorism in any form by any Government, we believe that we cannot stigmatize individual Member States forever as international rogues, irrespective of changes in their policies, simply because of their suspected links to terrorists.

In the present-day world, no country can hold a monopoly on any kind of conflict-resolution effort. This fully applies as well to the long-standing conflict in the Middle East, where the settlement process has been stalemated. As the saying goes, "it takes two hands to applaud". Broad-based international efforts are required to undo the taut Middle East knot. Russia, as one of the co-sponsors of the peace process launched in 1991 in Madrid, is prepared actively to cooperate actively with all to attain this goal.

For many years, so too has the Cyprus issue been awaiting the effective international cooperation needed for its resolution.

A synergy of efforts would provide the shortest cut to the resolution of both long-standing and of relatively new conflicts. But our stance by no means implies — and I wish to emphasize this — that any individual country that has influence in a zone of conflict or that can exert it over conflicting parties should not make active use of its own potential. It must do so, however, without putting up a high fence around itself to ward off others.

I should like in this connection to draw the Assembly's attention to Russia's peacekeeping efforts in the Commonwealth of Independent States region. First of all, as concerns Tajikistan, Russia is doing a great deal since we are equipped with the particular tools needed to do the job, in part for historical reasons. Our efforts have proved rather effective. Recently in Moscow an agreement was signed that put an end to the armed strife between the Government and the opposition in that country. The return to Dushanbe of Mr. Nuri, the opposition leader, shows that the agreement is already working.

Nevertheless, we want only our fair share of the deal. We note with satisfaction that the attitudes of Russia and the United Nations towards the parameters of the operation in Tajikistan are in concurrence, based on the close cooperation between the United Nations Observer Mission, the collective Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping force, and the contingent of Russian border troops. We welcome the intention of the United Nations to expand the mandate of its observers and to increase their number.

Nagorny Karabakh provides yet another example. Acting on its own, Russia has done a great deal to stabilize the situation in the region. But I believe that we have quite productively cooperated with the United States and France, which, jointly with Russia, are acting as co-chairmen of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk process to settle the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict offers a similar example.

I should now like to say a few words about peacekeeping as a whole. Over the last few years, a trend has been observed towards its decentralization. Naturally, there are objective reasons for this: the financial constraints placed on the United Nations, and the increase

in the number of regional organizations working, *inter alia*, in peacekeeping. We see nothing wrong with such decentralization.

However, it is extremely important that peacekeeping activities, whatever their sponsorship, should rely first and foremost on the underlying principles developed within the United Nations framework. We need here to be extremely cautious in dealing with peacekeeping activities. We believe that actions involving force should be carried out solely when authorized by the Security Council and under its direct supervision, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations.

As we move towards a multipolar world in the twenty-first century, it is essential to create conditions that will bring stability to a new world order. To that end, work must be completed to demolish the hurdles of the past and, above all, the legacy of the massive, decades-long arms race.

We are moving together along this path, and we are determined to proceed further. Together with the United States, we have been steadily reducing our national strategic arsenals. President Yeltsin of Russia and President Clinton of the United States have reached an understanding on the basic parameters for agreement in this area.

On the agenda now are systematic measures for a reduction in the nuclear arsenals of all the nuclear Powers. But let us be perfectly clear here: the stability of a multipolar world cannot be ensured simply by ending the nuclear-arms race of the past. It is also essential to have guarantees against the re-emergence of that arms race on a new basis, and here I have in mind the desire of individual countries to acquire nuclear weapons. This once again proves the need for urgent measures to relieve tensions in the relations between India and Pakistan.

Hence the essential need for the entire international community to give a universal dimension to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Those few countries that have so far remained outside the Treaty must, in our view, come to grips with their responsibility. They must realize that their own security is an integral part of global security, and they must assume those obligations to which over 180 States have already committed themselves as parties to the Treaty.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on a global scale, as well as the forthcoming talks to ban the production of weapon-grade fissile materials, figures likewise among those badly needed steps intended to impart stability to global security in the twenty-first century.

The implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction is getting under way. We consider this document as one of the major instruments designed to eliminate one of the weapons of mass destruction subject to the greatest proliferation. We have been working together with the deputies of the State Duma to ratify the Convention, and we look forward to the early, successful completion of those efforts.

But even now it is conventional weaponry that is killing people in local conflicts, often in situations where hostilities have already stopped. In this connection, we are fully aware of the humanitarian dimension of the problem of landmines. We think that the elimination of the threat of landmines to people, especially to civilian populations, is long overdue. We advocate active, phased efforts and negotiations to resolve it.

Stability on a global or regional level is impossible without the establishment of security systems. We have made headway in this direction on the European continent. We feel confident that only a universal organization which brings together all the members of the European family of nations can serve as a foundation for a genuinely durable security system in Europe in the twenty-first century. I am talking here about the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It is first and foremost in the frame of that forum that it is possible to seek agreement with a view to meeting the new and diverse challenges, which are not necessarily of a military and political nature.

A beneficial effect on the improvement of the European climate has already been exerted by the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian Federation, which was born out of the agonizing quest for compromise. This document will have broad international resonance and will doubtless play an essential role in European politics. Of course, the signing of that document has not changed our negative view of NATO's enlargement, which, on the one hand, totally ignores current realities and, on the other, is fraught with the risk of creating new dividing lines.

I must mention yet another contribution to the strengthening of good-neighbourly relations in Europe. I am referring to the agreements signed recently by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus that have allowed our three countries to take major steps forward in developing mutually beneficial, equitable relations which have strengthened stability in the region.

Russia has an interest in the security and stability of its Baltic neighbours and is ready to guarantee their security. Such guarantees could be provided in the form of our commitment backed by an agreement on good-neighbourly relations between Russia and the Baltic States. Such an agreement could become a kind of pact on regional security and stability.

The Asia-Pacific dimension is also of great significance to us. We are convinced that the Russian-Chinese agreements on borders and military détente in the frontier zone, which were also signed by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, will become a long-term factor for stability in that vast region. Russia also holds a number of other Asian countries — including India, Japan and the States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) — among its priority partners.

At the same time, our future in the twenty-first century at both the global and the regional levels depends directly on whether the international community will be able to stop and reverse the economic impoverishment of a great number of the Member States of the United Nations.

A central role in resolving the most important tasks facing all the countries of the world today belongs to the United Nations.

Mr. Zacharakis (Cyprus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Established over half a century ago, the Organization in general has succeeded in passing the durability test, traversed the thorny road of the bloc-confrontation era, survived both the ice-age period and the thaw in international relations. But today this could be viewed as axiomatic — the United Nations needs a rational renovation, referred to by virtually all the speakers in this debate. The substantive report of Secretary-General Kofi Annan gives clear proof of this need. Today, figuratively speaking, the image of this Organization in the twenty-first century is being shaped.

It is our strong conviction that the priority objective of the Organization's reform is to enhance the usefulness of the United Nations. Naturally, it is impossible to reform the United Nations in order to increase its effectiveness without overcoming the financial problems. We must note that the financial problems of the United Nations have unfortunately become chronic. It must therefore be emphasized that the responsibility for the financial health of the United Nations is borne by all Member States and that they must all pay their dues properly.

We are also in favour of expanding the membership of the Security Council. A decision to that effect is long overdue. But this expansion should not render our Organization less efficient.

The reform of the United Nations will take place against the background of the ever increasing role of regional organizations. This is a fully logical process. At the same time, we are convinced that the special leading role of the United Nations among all other universally recognized international organizations must be preserved.

We see the United Nations in the twenty-first century as a highly efficient Organization, free from bureaucratic constraints, and as a proactive Organization capable of swiftly responding to the challenges of the contemporary world.

I began my remarks by encouraging concerted action by the international community to concentrate on current problems and on the prospects for the coming century. And I shall conclude by citing a well-known saying: "Pessimists are no more than casual observers, it is the optimists who can change the world". We are optimists, and we believe that the United Nations will be able to play a positive role in the ongoing evolution of the international community.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Valdis Birkavs, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia.

Mr. Birkavs (Latvia): Allow me to congratulate the President on his election and express my confidence in his leadership during a crucially important session of the General Assembly. I wish to assure him that Latvia's past experience of fruitful bilateral cooperation with Ukraine will guide the delegation of Latvia in pursuit of our common tasks at this session of the Assembly.

I wish to recognize with gratitude Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia for his determined leadership during the fifty-first session of the Assembly, as well as of its General Committee, of which Latvia was a member.

At the outset I will address the need for United Nations reform, follow that with a response to the reform proposals of the Secretary-General, and, finally, inform the Assembly about Latvia's recent experiences with reforms.

Recent history suggests why reforming our Organization is essential. In 1945 many delegates to the founding conference of our Organization travelled to San Francisco by train and by sea. Delegates to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly have travelled to New York by air. They communicate with their capitals by very fast electronic means that did not exist 50 years ago. These advances in the technology of travel and information have facilitated an enormous and continuing expansion of international activities by ever greater numbers of State and non-State actors.

Most important for the United Nations is the expansion of international activities by state actors other than members of foreign services. The participants in these transgovernmental activities come from many governmental institutions: the courts, police, central banks and regulatory agencies.

State as well as non-State actors form successful transnational organizations that are independent of the United Nations system. These organizations can be competitors and cooperating partners for the United Nations. A United Nations that does not continually evolve to offer a coherent response to changing global conditions is a United Nations that risks becoming irrelevant.

The world needs a United Nations that can contribute effectively to the solution of complex global problems, such as those caused by the three-fold increase since 1945 of both the global population and the number of independent States. It needs a United Nations that will be a leader in the shaping of a new and workable international political order to fill the place vacated by the bipolar order of the cold-war era. This will be done best by a United Nations with universal membership.

Latvia believes that the package of reform proposals which the Secretary-General has presented to this Assembly contains measures which will enable the United Nations to respond to the imperative of organizational evolution. Latvia views this package as a work in progress, rather than as completed reform proposals for the long term. But even if the proposals are imperfect or not complete, they are the best this Assembly has before it. Latvia will support the reform package as a good springboard for reform and hopes that other Member States will do the same.

During the next few months, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General will need to work together to begin the process of implementing the reform package. The Secretary-General will have to report regularly to Member States on the progress of the reforms. He will have to develop implementation plans for recommendations approved, on the basis of informed considerations, by the General Assembly and other United Nations organs. This Assembly will have to elaborate further the procedure for addressing the proposals of the Secretary-General. It may wish to decide on additional reforms. Latvia expects that lessons will be learned during the implementation of the reform proposals and that the lessons will suggest mid-course corrections, improvements and even termination of some elements in the package.

Let me now turn to several substantive aspects of reform that may touch upon the Secretary-General's reform package, but are not a part of it.

The success of reform depends upon a sound financial footing for the Organization. In this regard, three recent interconnected processes may be noted. These processes are, first, rapid changes since 1991 in peacekeeping budgets and a basically unchanging regular budget; secondly, reform of the assessment methodology under way since 1994; and, thirdly and most important, recent unprecedented increases in overdue outstanding contributions.

The interdependence of these three processes means that the General Assembly will have to work out ways to treat the three processes as parts of a whole. It is also necessary that the Assembly make decisions that assure a genuine movement towards achieving a sound financial situation within a few years at most.

In regard to the very difficult question of Security Council reform, Latvia wishes to reiterate its continued support for an expansion of the Council that would result in more equitable geographical and small-state representation.

Latvia believes that the mixed outcomes of the complex post-cold-war peacekeeping operations initiated

by the Security Council may have relevance to the reform of the Council. Learning how to improve the success rate of these operations could have the side benefit of pointing towards Security Council reforms that might improve the maintenance of international peace and security.

Latvia has a special interest in the future of United Nations peacekeeping operations, since the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT), in which Latvians serve side by side with Estonians and Lithuanians, has completed a successful year of learning to cooperate and interface. This has been done while participating in a multinational operation: the Stabilization Force (SFOR) peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. BALTBAT, which has been trained and equipped with the help and encouragement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Nordic partners of the Baltic States, corresponds to their standards and has become fully operational.

In view of the growth of crimes that escape national punishment or that cross national borders, Latvia fully supports the establishment of an independent, efficient and authoritative international criminal court with independent prosecution. We consider this to be the most important development in international law since the creation of the International Court of Justice. Latvia intends to participate actively in the completion of the establishment of the court in 1998.

In regard to reforms in Latvia, it may be noted at the outset that they are driven by the need to overcome the consequences of 50 years of occupation, which caused the political, economic and social development of Latvia to fall behind its Nordic neighbours. In its sixth year of restored independence, Latvia continues with reforms designed to catch up with its Nordic neighbours. Latvia wishes to build a solidly democratic foundation for long-term economic and social well-being.

In this endeavour, Latvia receives international assistance from many sources. One source is the United Nations system, cooperation with which — primarily with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) — has contributed significantly to the improvement of social and economic well-being in Latvia. The United Nations presence in Latvia began in 1992 with an integrated office under the leadership of a resident coordinator who is also the UNDP representative. The integrated office, essentially a United Nations House, has allowed cost-effective access to the technical assistance offered by any part of the United Nations system. In addition, UNDP mobilizes bilateral and multilateral donors for projects in which it participates. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to UNDP and the donors who have made contributions to Latvia's reform projects.

I will now focus on reforms in only three of the areas that have an impact on social well-being and in which UNDP and the donors it has mobilized have been involved.

The first area is human rights. Although at its last session the Assembly concluded its consideration of the question of human rights in Latvia and Estonia, I believe that a brief report on some human rights developments during this year may nevertheless be of interest at this session.

Latvia cooperates with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights. Recently Latvia made a financial contribution — its first voluntary contribution ever to any United Nations body — in support of work by the Commissioner's staff on national human rights institutions.

The Latvian National Human Rights Office, established in 1995 as an independent national institution, has begun to have a tangible impact, particularly on the rights of vulnerable social groups. The somewhat unprecedented powers and functions of the Office have generated considerable interest in other central and eastern European countries. The Office has received UNDP technical and financial assistance at all stages of its conception, planning and development.

On 4 June 1997 Latvia ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, thus providing new legal guarantees to its residents, including the right of individual complaint and compulsory jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. Human rights were further strengthened through adoption of the Law on Refugees and Asylum Seekers and ratification of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Another area affecting social well-being and integration is language training offered to the relatively large segment of the population that lacks a knowledge of Latvian, the State language. The Government of Latvia approved the National Programme for Latvian Language Training in 1995. Since then the Programme has completed the training of a core body of teachers. Textbooks and teacher handbooks have been published.

The third area relevant to social well-being is support for the re-emergence of civil society. Since the time of national reawakening 10 years ago, almost 3,000 non-governmental organizations have been established in Latvia. The first major national non-governmental-organization forum will take place in Riga this weekend. I note that its organizers have received valuable assistance from the UNDP office in Latvia.

With regard to economic well-being, the Government has worked hard to achieve macroeconomic stability during the transition process from a centrally planned to an efficient market economy. As a result, economic growth has resumed and inflation has decreased dramatically. Real gross-domestic-product growth for 1997 is estimated at 4 per cent. By June of this year inflation had declined to about 7.5 per cent on an annual basis. These achievements are accompanied by continuing economic hardship for large segments of the population. Social welfare and poverty-alleviation projects are aimed at decreasing these hardships.

Latvia intends to apply the lessons learned from its reform experiences to its work as a member of the Economic and Social Council. One general lesson learned in Latvia is that the results of reforms include not only benefits but also costs. The cost hardest to bear is probably insecurity about the ultimate outcome of reforms.

We, the reformers of the United Nations, will surely have to bear the cost of insecurity as well. Perhaps a bit of ancient wisdom can diminish the insecurity. The Roman philosopher and Emperor Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, asked three questions about reforms:

> "Is any man afraid of change? Why, what can take place without change? What then is more pleasing or suitable"

than change?

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, His Excellency Chief Tom Ikimi.

Chief Ikimi (Nigeria): There is an overwhelming air of expectancy across the world as we gather at this fifty-second session of the General Assembly. It is hoped that the events of this session over the next few weeks will present a new vision for our Organization. The success of this session will depend upon Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, the Foreign Minister of Ukraine and current President of this Assembly. His reputation for excellence and hard work assures us all that under his presidency, the affairs of this session will be well ordered.

May I therefore take this opportunity, on behalf of my Head of State, General Sani Abacha, and the Government and the people of Nigeria, to extend to him our congratulations on his election. Let me also avail myself of this opportunity to extend to his predecessor, Ambassador Razali of Malaysia, our praises and high esteem for the purposeful and dynamic leadership he gave to the General Assembly during the past year.

My delegation notes with satisfaction the excellent manner in which our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has settled down to his onerous tasks and conducted the affairs of our Organization since he took office. He has demonstrated through his reform proposals his capacity to lead the United Nations into the twenty-first century. We will continue to extend to him our fullest cooperation and support.

As we gather here to contemplate the present state of our world, it is tempting to be optimistic that the United Nations will provide a solution to the problems of nations. The truth however, is that all around the world lies evidence of the Organization's unfinished tasks, and even of some of its failures to meet mankind's hopes and aspirations. Nonetheless, the fact that Member States continue to participate in the annual sessions of the General Assembly signifies that the search for peace and the pursuit of development are indeed ongoing processes. There still subsists an abiding faith in the United Nations and the willingness on the part of all of us to continue to strive for a better and more peaceful world.

That is why many nations have come here from time to time seeking understanding for their individual travails, believing passionately that here they would find accommodation and support. Many of them have returned home disappointed, confounded by the realities of today's world, as they come to terms with the awesome power wielded by the strong against the weak. We must remain mindful that international relations represent a complex mix of national circumstances and the demands and dictates of a changing external environment. International relations must be based on a perceived goal of the common good, on mutual respect for sovereignty and on accommodation and consideration for national circumstances and sensitivities. The United Nations must therefore continue to serve as the bulwark against the imposition of the will of the strong on that of the weak.

No nation ever addresses this body without a point of view peculiarly its own. We all come here with our histories, our cultures and our traditions, which give meaning and substance to the values we seek to impart to this Organization. In the case of my country, Nigeria, we have the added burden of manifest destiny. While we did not choose our destiny, we welcome its concomitant obligations and opportunities. For it is destiny, not national ambition, that motivates us in the discharge of our responsibilities.

In this regard, we see in the predicament of each troubled African State a mirror image of ourselves and a call to duty to render assistance in the best tradition of African brotherhood. Our exertions on behalf of regional and subregional peace and security arise from the circumstances of our history as the largest black nation on earth and the fortunate circumstances of our bountiful endowment. It is our destiny that we are home to one of every four Africans and one of every five blacks on earth. How could we be indifferent to the plight of the black race? It is our unshakeable destiny to champion the promotion and defence of the rights of all black people in Africa and in the diaspora. So, let no one imagine that we have only just embraced our peacekeeping role, because, as is well known, we nurse no expansionist or hegemonistic interests. We simply cannot be indifferent to the plight of our brothers in other African States when their lives are imperilled.

Since our admission to the United Nations on 7 October 1960, we have given a firm indication of our country's determination to chart an independent course in world affairs and also to resolutely defend the interests of Africa. When, for example, an atomic device was detonated in the Sahara in 1960, Nigeria did not hesitate to express its disapproval by breaking diplomatic relations with the country concerned. Furthermore, we are proud to have been part of the effort that brought about the formation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. We have since spared no effort to ensure the survival of that continental Organization. We were also in the vanguard of the struggle for the total liberation of Africa from colonial domination and of the campaign to eradicate apartheid in South Africa. We regarded the apartheid system as an affront to the dignity of the black race.

Similarly, our contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations span nearly three and a half decades. Starting with the Congo in 1960, we have committed in excess of a quarter of a million troops to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. They have been variously deployed to preserve peace and security in our own region and elsewhere around the globe, including in Bosnia, Cambodia and Lebanon.

At the inception of our Organization over half a century ago, its founding fathers captured, in the preamble to the Charter, a vision and an expectation of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war. It was hoped that a global order would emerge in which humanity would live at peace with itself and nations would be able to cooperate in furtherance of peace and security. In spite of the end of the cold war, which for many years was perceived as the main obstacle to the realization of United Nations goals, our world is still largely unsafe, insecure and unstable.

The threat of nuclear war still truly exists. This makes it imperative that the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains a priority item on the United Nations agenda. Over and above the threat posed by nuclear weapons, there has been a proliferation of inter-State and intra-State conflicts with attendant negative consequences for global peace and security. In Central Europe, Asia and in our continent, Africa, these conflicts have devastated societies, resulting in millions of refugees and displaced persons. Africa is the area worst affected by these conflicts.

The United Nations has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, it also recognizes the crucial role which regional and subregional organizations may play in the realization of these objectives. It was in the light of this recognition that the 16 countries of the West African subregion launched, in 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to address the conflict in Liberia, which at the time was rightly perceived as a threat not only to the corporate existence of a Member State but, indeed, to peace and security in the entire subregion.

As a result of the firm resolve of the leaders of ECOWAS and the determination of ECOMOG, coupled with the enhanced material and logistic support received from friendly countries within and outside the subregion, the disarmament of the warring factions was successfully accomplished as scheduled, on 31 January 1997. An environment of peace and security was then established throughout Liberia. It then became possible for free and fair legislative and presidential elections to be held as scheduled, on 19 July 1997. On 2 August this year, His Excellency Mr. Charles Ghankay Taylor was installed as

President of Liberia. That event brought to an end a sad chapter in the history of Liberia. As Nigeria is currently chairing ECOWAS, we take this opportunity to convey to the international community our profound appreciation for its support and assistance in bringing the Liberian conflict to a successful end.

It is ironic that as peace came to Liberia events in neighbouring Sierra Leone took a turn for the worse, following the violent overthrow of the legitimate Government of President Tejan Kabbah by a section of that country's military on 25 May 1997. That action was characterized by massive looting and wanton destruction of lives and property. Vital national assets, including the Central Bank, were looted and burnt down. Virtually all embassies and residences were either looted or vandalized by the ravaging group of coup plotters now in Freetown. All diplomatic missions have since evacuated Sierra Leone.

These developments have been roundly condemned by the OAU, the United Nations and the international community. It is encouraging that no foreign Government or organization has to date given recognition or support to the regime in Freetown. We urge that this position be maintained.

Meanwhile, ECOWAS has spared no effort in seeking a peaceful resolution of the problem created in Sierra Leone. At Conakry, in June 1997, ECOWAS objectives were defined to include: first, the early reinstatement of the legitimate Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah; secondly, the return of peace and security; and, thirdly, the resolution of the issues of refugees and displaced persons. Accordingly, ECOWAS adopted a combination of three strategies, namely dialogue and negotiations, sanctions and embargo, and the possible use of force. A mechanism to monitor and implement the ECOWAS response to the situation in Sierra Leone was established, comprising four countries: Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. During the last ECOWAS summit, held recently at Abuja, the committee was expanded to five with the addition of Liberia, and was raised to the status of Heads of State.

At that same summit, additional measures were imposed on the illegal regime in order to strengthen the negotiation process towards the peaceful resolution of the crisis in Sierra Leone. ECOMOG was mandated to oversee the implementation of these measures. In pursuing this goal of the peaceful resolution of the Sierra Leone crisis, we seek the support of the international community.

Africa has of late witnessed a series of inter-State conflicts which have in some cases led either to the disintegration of some countries or to the total collapse of central government authority. Consequently, many well-meaning members of the international community have tried to propose solutions for prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa. Regrettably, these various initiatives have not only been made outside the framework of the United Nations, but, more seriously, have tended to ignore the existing framework and mechanisms within the African continent. Yet it is obvious that the existing mechanisms at both the subregional and the continental levels have demonstrated a proven capacity to resolve African problems. ECOWAS, the Southern African Development Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have all established a reputation as viable instruments for conflict resolution. Of course, most of the regional and subregional bodies require material and logistical support from the United Nations as well as from individual members of the international community.

Nigeria believes that no initiative, however well intentioned, can succeed in resolving conflicts if it is not discussed and adopted within the framework of the OAU Central Organ's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Accordingly, we recommend that all current initiatives should be first channelled through the existing organs of the OAU.

It is our view that national sovereignty and the fundamental rights of the individual are not necessarily mutually exclusive, provided a proper balance is struck. Indeed, they can be mutually reinforcing. The problem arises when, either deliberately or inadvertently, the prerogative of sovereignty is made subject to the absolute rights of the individual. This is a disservice both to the cause of freedom and to the true purpose of democracy. What is required in the interest both of the State and of the enhancement of human rights is a proper recognition that the right of the individual only begins at the point where the sovereign right of the State terminates. We must resist the attempt in some quarters to use human rights as a ploy to engage in activities designed to undermine the sovereignty of some Member States in the United Nations family.

Two years ago, the present Administration in my country announced a programme of return to civil rule. Since then, commendable progress has been made in the implementation of that programme. We are encouraged by the successful outcome of the elections held so far and of

the processes which we have undertaken to ensure a successful transition. The rest of the programme is firmly on course. We remain firmly confident that all the processes entailed in the transition programme will be completed on schedule, by 1 October 1998.

We have always given due recognition and appreciation to all friendly countries in the international system which have shown genuine concern for and understanding of the complexities of the Nigerian situation. After all, in 1960 we as a country willingly embraced the Westminster model of Government put in place by the departing colonial Power. That system took little or no account of our traditional institutions, or indeed of our customs and cultures. Indeed, that system collapsed after six years. In 1979, my country, being more adventurous, looked far across the Atlantic Ocean and adopted the presidential system of government. However, the cost of running the system placed a huge burden on our country's economy. Not surprisingly, that system too collapsed after five years.

Today, no one can blame us as a country for searching for a system of government best suited for Nigeria, a system which takes into account the realities of our nation. You may call it by whatever name, but the peace, stability, development and good governance of our people remains uppermost in our minds.

At 37, Nigeria is by all standards a relatively young nation. Even those countries that have been nations for centuries and have inherited relatively stable societies are still grappling with the complexities of nationhood and experimenting with new formulas to cope with the exigencies of state. They were not present when their forefathers, who also fought bitter civil wars, struggled to hand them their present inheritance. They should therefore show greater understanding for those of us engaged at this time in the arduous task of forging new and stable societies from the ruins of colonialism.

If Nigeria appears concerned and indeed preoccupied with the vital issues of peace and stability at home, in West Africa and in Africa as a whole, it is because we are convinced that the urgent demands of socio-economic development cannot be effectively tackled without peace and stability. Nigeria believes that peace and stability in Africa will facilitate the channelling of our limited resources into the critical areas of political, social and economic development. Consequently, since the end of our civil war in 1970, we have embarked on a deliberate and substantial reduction of the Nigerian armed forces from a strength of 500,000 in all ranks to the barely 100,000 that it is today. This has resulted in a corresponding reduction in military expenditure.

Security considerations have sometimes compelled countries to allocate a disproportionate share of their national budgets to military expenditure. This has had the effect of reducing resources available for development. The end of the cold war had raised hopes that substantial resources would be available in the form of a peace dividend for development. Unfortunately, the proliferation of regional conflicts and civil wars has led even the United Nations into allocating enormous resources for peacekeeping and conflict resolution, thus weakening its capacity to fulfil its Charter obligations regarding social and economic development.

Since its establishment 52 years ago, the United Nations has served as an instrument for implementing a global agenda of a diverse, complex and pressing nature. As has been evident from the debates that have taken place in the General Assembly, no one today can deny the need for and the urgency of reform.

In this regard, the Secretary-General has now made a number of proposals, in addition to the ongoing efforts of the General Assembly on the subject of reform. My delegation will actively participate in the consideration of these proposals. In doing so, it is important to stress that the outcome should encompass and take on board the views and interests of all Member States.

The reforms of the United Nations, as proposed for the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the specialized agencies, would be incomplete without a corresponding reform of the Security Council. A reform of the Council would entail a restructuring and expansion of its membership in both categories to take account of, among other things, the increased membership of our Organization and the need to reflect the interests of all the constituent regions.

Happily, there is now broad agreement on the need for the expansion of the membership of the Security Council in both categories. With almost a third of the membership of the United Nations, Africa should have adequate representation in an expanded Security Council. At the thirty-third summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) held in Harare, Zimbabwe, last June, leaders of Africa reaffirmed the need for the region to have two permanent seats with full veto powers. Nigeria considers this demand legitimate and well deserved.

We stand here today as guardians of the heritage of our cherished Organization, even as we gaze at the future horizon and the dawning of the new millennium. The vision we harbour about the future of the United Nations is inevitably conditioned by the objective realities of the present and the vigour with which we shall pursue the hopes and challenges of the new millennium.

It is within our means and our grasp to make the next 50 years of the United Nations different, more exciting and generally more beneficial to the world at large. We can plead no alibi or extenuating circumstances should we fail to do so. For, unlike in San Francisco, when nearly two thirds of the present membership of the United Nations did not participate in the creation of the bold new world, this time around, we, all 185 nations at the United Nations, are the world, and we are present at the reordering of the new international world order, as envisaged by the reform proposals of the United Nations and its organs. We should take the opportunity to establish a revamped United Nations of shared values and interests and to promote a greater equality of States.

Students of history will bear testimony to the fact that over the centuries, centres of power and influence have shifted constantly from one part of the world to another. The rise and fall of great empires has been a constant phenomenon in human history. A gale wind of change is now blowing across the globe. My country, Nigeria, identifies with that change, which inevitably will result in new centres of power and influence. It is not to be imagined that any one continent will forever remain at the periphery of the emerging new world order.

The millennium bell tolls for the nations of the world as we await the dawning of the new age. We must not shirk our responsibility for the regeneration of the United Nations. We are the world. Let us, from this historic Hall, reaffirm our faith in humankind. Let our dream come true for a new and vibrant inner vision that will light our paths into the next century. Now is the time; as the late Mother Teresa so gently reminded us,

> "Tomorrow has not yet come, yesterday is already gone, and we have only today — let us begin".

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.